

REMARKS

An information disclosure statement (IDS) was submitted on July 23, 2007, that cites the references in the specification.

This Amendment after final rejection should be entered because it places the claims in better form for appeal by amending certain claims, e.g., 1 and 8, to make the chip discharge more clear and to make claim 6 independent.

The rejection of claims 1 to 10 as being obvious over Snekkenes (US Pat. 6,086,717) is traversed.

The claims are directed to a lower chip conduit pipe having a first mode that connects to a top separator and a second mode that discharges chips directly into the digester vessel. Claims 1 and 8 (but not claim 6) make clear that the “chip inlet conduit” is a single chip inlet passage that conveys chips to both a top separator and directly inside the vessel. Snekkenes does not disclose a single chip inlet that alternatively supplies chips to a top separator and directly to a digester.

Snekkenes discloses in Figure 2 a chip supply line 21 that enters the digester and turns upward to supply chips to an inverted top separator and also shows a second pipe entering the digester and discharge downward into the digester. The second pipe is not identified as a chip inlet. The rejection is based on an unsupported assumption that the second pipe (which is not labeled and not described in the specification) is a chip inlet. Snekkenes does not state that this unidentified pipe provides chips.

The unlabeled pipe in Snekkenes may be a “center pipe” for black liquor input, as discussed in Snekkenes at, for example, column 9, line 10. The center pipe is to add black liquor to the digester and is not an input pipe for chips. The center pipe is discussed in the text of Snekkenes, but is not associated with a reference number. While Snekkenes does not specifically state that the extra inlet pipe shown in Figure 2 is a black liquor input pipe, it is more likely that the unlabeled pipe in Figure 2 of Snekkenes is a center pipe that provides black liquor to the digester than a second input pipe for the chip slurry.

Snekkenes, col. 3, ln. 65-67, shows one chip conduit 21 that transports chips to a top separator. Snekkenes states that chips are supplied to the top separator and makes no mention of supplying chips directly into the digester (without passing through the top separator). *See* Snekkenes, column 3, lines 60-67; column 7, line 64 to column 8, line 10. Snekkenes discloses a single line, i.e., line 21, for conveying chips to the bottom of the screen basket of a digester. There is no suggestion in Snekkenes of more than one chip input line to the digester. The obviousness rejection should be withdrawn because the statement in the Action that Snekkenes discloses two chip input lines is unsupported and cannot be supported by the unlabeled input line in Figure 2 which is most likely a black liquor input center line.

Claims 1 and 8 require the chip inlet conduit to have a single inlet pipe extending through the vessel that couples to a conduit to the chip conveyor and to a discharge directly to the vessel (separately from the chip conveyor). Even under the construction of Snekkenes stated in the Action, there is no showing in Snekkenes of a single inlet pipe as

required by claims 1 and 8 extending through the vessel where the inlet pipe serves both chips flowing to a top separator and chips flowing directly into the vessel.

Snekkenes teaches away from the claimed invention in which a conduit pipe is configured to connect to the top separator or to discharge chips directly to the vessel. Further, Snekkenes does not suggest the advantages of the invention that allows for relatively easy conversion of a digester vessel between vapor phase and hydraulic phase operations. See Paras. 0029 to 0037 of Application.

All claims are in good condition for allowance. If any small matter remains outstanding, the Examiner is requested to telephone applicants' attorney. Prompt reconsideration and allowance of this application is requested.

The Commissioner is hereby authorized to charge any deficiency, or credit any overpayment, in the fee(s) filed, or asserted to be filed, or which should have been filed herewith (or with any paper hereafter filed in this application by this firm) to our Account No. 14-1140.

Respectfully submitted,

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